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Asylum Seekers

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Blindfolded and gagged, with his hands tied behind his back, Jose grimaced as a bat struck him again. On his right, an ax moved forward and backwards slowly tracing his neck. “Tell the boy to shup up. Make him shut up,” one of the men yelled as he ripped the duct tape off of Jose’s lips. With tears of fear falling from his eyes, Jose’s three-year old son watched as his father was tortured by a cartel in Reynosa, Mexico. Earlier that day, Jose and his son had entered the United States to seek asylum, but under new policies enforced by the Trump administration, the two were sent back to Mexico. Jose was walking down the street hand in hand with his son, when a group of men thrust a hood over his head and forced them into a vehicle (Jordan, 2019).

On November 25, 2019 Jose, a 28-year-old Honduras migrant and his son were kidnapped. Hours of negotiation between Jose’s wife, Cindy, who was living in the United States and the cartel would occur that evening and for days to follow. She listened over the phone as her husband was tortured and her son wept and watched. *The New York Times* reviewed a chain of recorded phone calls and voicemails between Cindy and the cartel. It was clear in the recordings that Cindy was desperate to help her family but had little resources to do so. Working in a bakery barely paid the bills. With the help of extended family and friends, Cindy was able to pull together a ransom of \$3,000 (Jordan, 2019). Shortly after, her son and husband were released back into the streets of Reynosa, Mexico. Still waiting for the United States decision to grant them asylum.

In the past decade, the number of people fleeing violence and persecution in their native countries has grown drastically. These people are desperately seeking a safe place for themselves and their families due to race, membership in a particular social group, political affiliation, national origin, and/or religious beliefs. For many years, the United States saw the need to aid

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these individuals by allowing them to seek asylum and find safety within the United States. What a relief our great Nation was to those who were fleeing danger. These national values made the United States the global leader in aiding refugees with resettlement efforts. In fact, the United States used to offer safety to more refugees than every other nation combined. (“An Overview of”, 2020).

Sadly, that statistic has drastically changed. Under the Trump administration, the United States government has enacted new vetting procedures on refugees prior to their entrance into the country. These incredibly strict procedures have made seeking safety and shelter within our borders nearly impossible for migrants. Because of these changes, the wait time to enter the United States has dramatically increased and has left refugees in dire and dangerous living situations in the meantime (“An Overview of”, 2020). The United States, a country who was once a leader in ensuring safety for refugees, is now turning its back on those who are most in need.

In 2018, the number of asylum seekers the United States Customs and Border Protection processed at ports of entry at the U.S. – Mexico border decreased significantly. Instead of waiting in America with safe living conditions and access to necessities like clean running water and toilets, migrants are being forced to wait in Mexico for their asylum applications to be processed. With migrant shelters at full capacity, thousands of families are now living and sleeping on the streets. After the first eight months into this policy change, the number of names on the list of asylum seekers waiting to be processed was over 26,000. That number grows higher every single day (Narea, 2019).

The new policy, entitled the Migration Protection Protocols program (MPP) but more widely known to insiders as the “Remain in Mexico” program, leaves migrants anxiously waiting

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for their applications to be processed. Once applications are processed, migrants have to wait yet again to learn of the decision made regarding their asylum application. Over 56,000 migrants are awaiting the results of their asylum application in the streets of Mexico (Narea, 2019). An added hurdle, with thousands of migrants living on the streets, it can be nearly impossible for them to learn of the United States government's decision because they have no mailing address and little access to communication devices. The vast majority of these individuals are impoverished and have extremely limited resources.

Although the Remain in Mexico policy is relatively new, the consequences of turning back thousands of migrants to Mexico has already had significant aftereffects. Thousands of migrants have setup makeshift tent camps across the U.S. – Mexico border to provide some kind of shelter for themselves whilst they wait for processing. Tents are assembled with any available materials. These include a myriad of random items such as trash bags, articles of clothing, and pieces of plastic that are found on the streets. The camp in Matamoros, Mexico, sprang up in the summer of 2019 and has no prior history. These temporary, makeshift homes leave thousands of migrants stranded without basic necessities like running water for drinking and bathing, and public toilets (Narea, 2019).

One of the fathers in the camp told a reporter with *This American Life* that he takes his daughter into the forested hills when she needs to go to the bathroom so she can have some privacy. Afterwards they go down to the Rio Grande river to wash up. A volunteer nurse, Helen Perry, started a small relief group with a handful of other volunteers to help migrant families. She knows people go to the hills to find privacy whilst they go to the bathroom. But according to Perry, when it rains the rainwater washes the feces in the hills down into the camp, which then leads migrants to suffer from infectious diarrhea. She treats migrants for gastrointestinal

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infections every day, but these infections come back again and again due to poor living conditions (Glass, 2019).

Not only are these migrant's basic needs not being met, they are also at risk for extortion, kidnapping, and rape by cartel members. Perry also told Glass, "When I first showed up in the camp, a woman came up to me and asked me if we would be bringing in condoms, because when she got sexually assaulted again she wanted to be able to ask her attacker to wear a condom so she wouldn't get pregnant" (Glass, 2019). The current situation for stranded asylum seekers is incongruous and heartbreaking. The violence doesn't stop with just rape, according to a report conducted by Human Rights First. More than 600 asylum seekers have been the victim of violent crimes in these camps since the summer of 2019 (Aguilar, 2019).

Another story published by *This America Life* highlighted a father and his children who had been kidnapped by the Mexican cartel under the Remain in Mexico policy. The reporter, Emily Green, met the duo on a bridge in Nuevo Laredo, which connects Mexico to the United States. At that time, the United States was sending back migrants daily around 1:00 p.m. The migrants who were sent back to Mexico under MPP were easy to see, as they carried clear plastic bags with documentation inside. The father talked with Emily the reporter for a few minutes and told her he was not a criminal. In fact, he was a businessman who owned a small clothing store in Honduras. Gangs in Honduras demand money from businesses, this is called a war tax. This war tax kept increasing and increasing over time, and eventually the father could no longer pay it. One night, the cartel broke into the father's home and threatened to hurt the family and rape his daughter. (Glass, 2019). With little options, the father chose to flee Honduras and take his family to safety.

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The father continued to tell the reporter he didn't know where to go or what to do. The family had no money. The father had heard that many people are kidnapped at the camp they were currently staying at, and his fear was evident. Towards the end of their conversation, the reporter allowed the father to make a phone call using her cell phone. The father called his sister who lived in New Jersey to update her on their request to seek asylum in the United States. This father thanked the reporter, and they parted ways. That evening, the father's sister called the reporter in a panic. The family had been kidnapped and the cartel was demanding a ransom of \$18,000 which the sister could not manage (Glass, 2019). Events like this are all too common in tent camps that have popped up since the Remain in Mexico policy was put into place. Innocent people and their families are being kidnapped and held for ransom by dangerous cartel groups.

Many believe the United States is making it too easy for cartels to kidnap migrants. By sending migrants back to Mexico in large groups, they stand out to onlookers. Carrying their limited possessions in plastic bags also distinguishes them as migrants with no stable shelter. According to a publication from *This American Life*, the most dangerous time period for asylum seekers are the hours after they have returned to Mexico. Once migrants cross the bridge, they are transported to the Mexican Immigration Office via van. Outside of the office, cartel men monitor who is coming in and going out of the building (Glass, 2019). Many migrants are kidnapped once they leave the Mexican Immigration Office and are attempting to walk back to the camps or a shelter.

According to the U.S. State Department, many border communities are considered extremely dangerous. Matamoros, Mexico, is one of these cities. The government has proclaimed it a Level 4 "Do Not Travel" advisory because rates of violent crime, kidnapping, and robbery are so high (Narea, 2019). Shockingly, this is the same level of threat as Iraq and

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Syria. Yet, we have two major governments—the United States and Mexico—who leave incredibly vulnerable migrant families to become targets at the hands of the Mexican cartel. This is both sad and incredibly disappointing.

In a traditional United Nations (UN) refugee camp, the perimeter of the camp is fenced. This allows the UN to keep track of who comes in and who goes out. Additionally, refugees have access to medication, clean water, sanitation, and food. Certain refugee camps even provide counseling to individuals who have experienced trauma (“The Global Refugee”, 2019). The meager scenarios that face asylum seekers along the Mexican border are nothing like a traditional refugee camp. People are kidnapped daily, there is no documentation of who is in the camp or who has disappeared. Basic resources like food and drinking water are being provided by volunteer groups who have decided that something must be done to help.

It is not just refugee and volunteer groups that dislike and oppose the Trump Administration’s new “Remain in Mexico” policy. Federal asylum officers are also condemning the program. Asylum officers conduct migrant interviews and up until the new policy change was put into effect, were able to help refugees flee persecution. The labor union for federal asylum officers believes the “Remain in Mexico” policy is, “fundamentally contrary to the moral fabric of our Nation.” These officers stated their duty is “to protect vulnerable asylum seekers from persecution,” and do not feel this new policy is aligned with the values of our nation (Allyn, 2019). Rather, it creates a major divergence between the personal responsibility of asylum officers and the president’s commands. This clearly puts asylum officers in a lose-lose situation.

Moreover, the asylum workers’ union wrote to the 9th Circuit Court of Appeals, “[The Migrant Protection Protocols program] violates our Nation’s longstanding tradition and

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international treaty and domestic obligation not to return those fleeing persecution to a territory where they will be persecuted” (Allyn, 2019). It is typical for federal workers to obey the orders of the president of the United States however it is apparent asylum officers strongly oppose the Migrant Protection Protocols program and have thus sought help from the federal appeals court. A fundamental piece of the asylum officer’s job is to ensure migrants are safe and supported. This new policy does not support migrants.

According to asylum officers, “The Migrant Protection Protocols program, contrary to the Administration’s claim, does nothing to streamline the process, but instead increases the burdens on our immigration courts and makes the system more inefficient” (Allyn, 2019). In short, the Migrant Protection Protocols program could and likely will place the lives of migrants who are hoping to win asylum in danger. Officers state, this is “something that they did not sign up to do when they decided to become asylum and refugee officers for the United States government.” (Allyn, 2019).

In a separate brief filed with the 9th Court of Appeals in the same lawsuit, Janet Napolitano, former secretary of Homeland Security, and James Clapper who served as director of national intelligence write, “Violating this obligation does more than place these particular migrants in harm’s way – it threatens the foundation of the international refugee system, which depends on cooperation between countries that cannot be sustained in the face of flagrant violations under the Migrant Protection Protocols” (Allyn, 2019). Additionally, these former United States officials do not believe there is evidence or reason to believe asylum seekers are a security risk to United States citizens. Therefore, there is no reason they should not be permitted to seek safety and shelter in the United States.

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Initially the Migrant Protection Protocol program was blocked by a federal judge, but since May the 9th Circuit Court of Appeals overruled and has since allowed the program to continue. Fortunately, additional unions, including the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), are continuing to press forward and challenge the program (Allyn, 2019). It is alarming that the officers who work with asylum seekers on a daily basis show greater concern for migrants than the United States government and the government of Mexico.

It is clear there is a lack of human rights for the migrants who await asylum. Human rights are exactly as they sound, they are rights that belong to all people as a benefit of being a human being. In 1948, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was decreed by the United Nations and created by a group of delegates from diverse cultural backgrounds from all regions of the world. This document was a collection of fundamental human rights that all people were meant to be protected by. Article 14 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights states, “Everyone has the right to seek and to enjoy in other countries asylum from persecution. This right may not be invoked in the case of prosecutions genuinely arising from non-political crimes or from acts contrary to the purposes and principles of the United Nations” (“Universal Declaration,” n.d.). The United States of America is a permanent member of the United Nations. It seems hypocritical and incredibly disappointing that our government has created policies that increase suffering for migrants who are clearly in danger.

Not only are the migrants at the United States – Mexico border unable to seek asylum within the United States, they are also deficient of other essential human rights. In Article 25 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, a standard of living is clearly described. The article explicitly states, “Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and

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necessary social services, and the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age or other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond his control” (“Universal Declaration,” n.d.). The migrants fleeing their home countries due to fear of persecution is certainly beyond their control. The complete absence of food, clothing, housing, and medical care in these makeshift tent camps is astonishing. Men, women, and children are surviving day by day with the very little they have in the hopes of a brighter and safer future in America. Not only are these families currently suffering, they will feel the mental effects of this traumatic time period in their lives for decades to come. Sadly, they will likely not have the resources to help them heal both physically and mentally.

The final article in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights that is worth noting is Article 26 which states, “Everyone has the right to education” (“Universal Declaration,” n.d.). As an educator, it breaks my heart to see and read about children who are lacking basic needs such as food, shelter, and clean water. An added sting is knowing these migrant children, who may spend months waiting in tent camps with their families, have no access to formal education while they seek asylum. Additionally, children with special needs are receiving no special supports. Migrant children with limited access to education are at an extreme disadvantage to other children throughout the world. The stages of development a child naturally progresses through with access to education and a healthy living situation will likely be delayed for migrant children who are experiencing poverty and extreme trauma at the border.

Although the overall picture seems uninviting, it is refreshing and incredibly compassionate to see volunteers step up to the plate to help migrants in need. These volunteers come from all backgrounds; medical, education, religious, and mental health fields. The volunteers who have decided to lend a hand have chosen to act now, rather than waiting on

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government policies to change. America citizens are taking the initiative to ensure migrants have a shoulder to lean on.

The future of migrant families seeking asylum in America is unknown. At first glance, the policy changes for migrants seem unfathomable and hopeless. Families are living in the streets of Mexico with little food, no running water, little access to legal resources, and living in constant danger. Two large governments, the United States of America and Mexico, seem to do little to ease the hardship. Instead, they are sitting back and watching as innocent people continue to suffer. This situation that thousands of migrants are facing is inherently inhumane. In my opinion, the United States government should immediately stop sending asylum seekers back to Mexico, and instead allow them to access safe, legal and social support while their asylum claims are pending. There are no winners with the current program, and those who are most vulnerable will continue to suffer until new policy changes are put in place.

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An Argument Against Transhumanism

Ryan Melcher

Humanity has remained relatively constant throughout time. Our solutions to progress have been met with equal contributions to disaster. Many advancements have pushed the envelope of biological constraints, more so for the betterment of mankind. Julian Huxley, brother of philosopher and writer Aldous Huxley, was deep into these new ideologies. The term 'transhumanism' was coined by Julian, who stated 'I believe in transhumanism: once there are enough people who can truly say that, the human species will be on the threshold of a new kind of existence, as different from ours as ours is from that of Peking man. It will, at last, be consciously fulfilling its real destiny.' The ideals of transhumanism offer many generous benefits. Our biological limitations are no match for scientific advancement, improving all things physical and emotional have implications to open up new horizons for humanity's development. The fundamental beliefs that shine through Huxley and transhumanists center around a desire to rid the world of disease and weakness. It's hard to disagree, as these shortcomings we face today are issues we've faced since conception, and with the ideals seen in this philosophy- all can be healed.

However, the ever-growing argument that things aren't as they may play on paper are coming forward. These contentions grew from differing perspectives, often argued alongside religion. One major argument offers that there is an innate problem from modifying our given human nature. A key aspect of this debate arises from designer babies. Portrayed in Aldous Huxley's most popular novel, the implications of such technology stray away from the

‘God-given’ aspects most religions point to for our distinct characteristics. Joel Thompson, writer and professor, states it’s this need to ‘master the mystery of birth’ which destroys the bond between a parent and respective child.

Thompson argues that it’s the different perspective of price, the one of monetary value, that would keep this at bay, stating, ‘The initial high cost, availability, risk and uncertainty about life-extending therapies is likely to curtail the number of people in the world who will pursue it.’ Later going onto talking about cosmetic surgery, for example, being in demand of only those who can afford it. I argue, that even with the minority of the rich having access, the effect would be dramatic. Envisioning a world where dictators and those in control have the option to never leave office so long as they never die would be frightening. The power that is already possessed would only exponentiate. Huxley agrees with Thompson on the issue of designer babies, with both being skeptical of the humility of chance and pure humanity seen with a newborn. Pushing boundaries is fundamental to humanity’s growth, but the bounds of human nature are sensitive and often abused.

The most prominent thesis to what defines transhumanism is the idea that one-day humans will be able to transform into something vastly enhanced from our current condition that these new forms will no longer be able to be considered ‘humans’. Humans are different than any other animal that has or is roaming the Earth- the language that brought self-conscious behavior and teaching has allowed humanity to grow farther and wider than any previous contender. Studies have often pointed their attention to discovering the Earth, the living cells and their main components that comprise of all life in the universe... yet the subject of human nature had yet to be fully understood. The human race has yet to discover all of its potentials,

the act of introducing technology to humanism is only going to propel this strife. Huxley wrote his essay and developed these ideas without the presence of many of the modern-day technologies we have today. The introduction of biomechanics and research into the connection between digital space has only lead to more questions. Humans have learned that through technical advancements wonders once thought to be unsolvable are being not-so. With each stride in scientific pose comes a concerning outlook on the negative effects of transhumanism. In its deepest sense, transhumanism poses more of a threat than a benefit to society.

The argument between transhumanists and bioethics often finds itself struggling between shared core beliefs. Transhumanists share that human biology is capable of being improved and it's at the benefit of all humanity. As ethicist Tom Koch writes, it's these advancements that allow 'science to fix our failings'. A point of interest arises when the implications of such are truly implemented. Koch explains that the scientists in charge of changes in genomes would understand which ones to be promoted and which should be eliminated. The future of humans are those that can be treated as machines. With parts being replaced and changed with every new iteration, outdated mechanisms and therefore, people, being left in the dust.

Koch states many past happenings where there were 'forced sterilization of *defectives*'. The services under this euthanasia craze even garnered enough attention for a 1927 court case, in which it was legalized to sterilize women who contain undesirable traits. Now, it is expressed by Koch that modern-day eugenics at least for a large part disparage these past

actions. Nevertheless, it is hard to believe that history won't repeat itself with different but eerily similar cases.

Notably, Francis Fukuyama, Professor of International Political Economy at Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies, has aimed his sights at transhumanists and believes they are a detriment to society. Being on the President's Council of Bioethics, Fukuyama states, "Underlying this idea of the equality of rights is the belief that we all possess a human essence that dwarfs manifest differences in skin color, beauty, and even intelligence. This essence, and the view that individuals therefore have inherent value, is at the heart of political liberalism. But modifying that essence is the core of the transhumanist project." These statements by Fukuyama are only some of the many implications of the social and political changes seen through the use of technology to dramatically increase our capabilities.

A clear example of these future dreams of transhumanists is nanotechnology. Author Richard A.L. Jones writes, "At a stroke, it is predicted, this will end scarcity – any material or artefact, from the most basic commodities to the most precious objects... Replacement parts for humans will be simple to make, and will have capabilities that hugely exceed their natural prototypes. Everything – the economy, the environment, even what it is to be human – will be utterly transformed." A cog in a wheel of the corporate machine, man will become slaves not only to the devices of their own will, but to the mechanics that make up the core functions of their body. Through these advancements, humanity reaches a crossroads, the exponential growth of science in technology have led man to destroy the ailments of disaster and disease. At a cost, the same offspring of these changes lead to the same gadgets that hijack our livelihoods, develop unhealthy habits in our lives such as the abundance of screen usage and

sleepwalking through life. Our lives become part of the same machines our bodies would connect to, constantly racing in neverending strife for innovation, making each day harder to be in the present.

Humanity was brought upon by chance. A glimpse of a future where instead we rule by choice has become an interesting yet destructive force to reckon with. This evitable change to a future ruled by such technology will further propagate that humans are vulnerable beings, built from a rich and unique human nature. The race for the unknown may lead to the loss of what humans all inherently understand. Humanity was built by struggle, evolution brought us through the ages and has consistently been related to our well-being. Underlying this idea is the equality of rights, the belief that we all possess a human essence manifests itself through our distinctive skin color, beauty, intelligence, and well being. This essence, and the view that individuals therefore have inherent value, is at the heart of political liberalism, and modifying such aspects of our nature is the core principle of transhumanism. If we start transforming ourselves into something superior, what rights will these enhanced beings claim, and what rights will they possess when compared to those left behind, and debates on whether these humans left behind will even afford not to follow. These prospects are seen even within our own communities here in Nebraska, and the implications of those third world countries who do not possess the riches we do will be left further behind than we could ever imagine. Menacing ideals for the transhumanist are the same moral standards that have consistently pushed the lower class systems to oblivion.

Besides, humans were created as resilient beings. The idea of antifragility is a topic of growing discussion, where it points to turmoil and shock as a means of growth in society.

Author Scott Cendrowski writes about persistence in humanity, “In science it’s called hormesis, the concept that limited doses of a harmful substance tend to make organisms stronger, healthier, and prepared for a bigger dose next time.” Unlike the principle of hormesis, transhumanism wishes to rid humanity of these factors which allow for growth and strength. There are clear and present vices of living a life of pure leisure, Tim O’Brian writes, “Those who live in leisure struggle more with having any meaning in their life beyond the superficial. They also often have more difficulties with food, alcohol and drug issues.” There is a significant sense of gluttony when we are given a long break from our usual struggles. In an age of defining mental illness, many people have gained issues with depression and anxiety. Medicines can trick our bodies to altering chemical imbalances caused by these disorders, although the issue will never fully be solved unless approached at a different angle. The abundance of technology and improvement has directly correlated to the growth of mental disease. The utopian perspective is one that alludes to many, a world where disease and strife are threats of the past. However, I impose that society take a different approach to transhumanism, a view that shows the sinister and likely outcome of such technology. Hearing the siren call of transhumanism is one part, but another is understanding the broad and staggering impact that technology has on our lives today and will in the future.

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Jackson Long

Omaha North

Right to Move

The fact of the matter is quite simple: there is systemic discrimination in urban planning. It is not a rarity, nor is it invisible. Rather, it sits quietly atop the streets of the American city, hiding in plain sight. Within the Universal Declaration of Human Rights – a self-proclaimed “yardstick by which we measure right and wrong” – all humans are declared to be born with “the right to freedom of movement and residence within the borders of each State.” There is a right more integral, though, and that is the right to move in general, to have the same access to the wonders of their resident city as their peers. The truth is, even in a prosperous city in a prosperous nation, classism and ableism leave countless people in the absence of this right, and it doesn’t take much examination to determine how.

As a byproduct of its sprawling design, the average American city makes car ownership mandatory. With the ever-expanding distance between the urban core and the suburbs, the city becomes dominated by cars. As roads widen, sidewalks disappear, and liberty for people without cars disappears with them. This is no small population, either; as of 2015, nearly one third of Americans did not own a driver’s license.

With a high initial price combined with the costs of fuel and repairs, car ownership is a heavy burden for those who do not boast a high income. It’s for this reason that almost two thirds of transit riders have a household income below \$50,000, and more than twenty percent make less than \$15,000. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, people who walk and bike to work are significantly more likely to have low incomes. The idea that pedestrian and cycling infrastructure is only a luxury for wealthy families is a dangerous myth; this infrastructure is crucial for the well-being of the most vulnerable members of our society. If we really want to break the cycle of poverty, we can no longer afford to mandate the existing costs of transportation.

Unfortunately, poor city planning does not limit itself to class discrimination. People with disabilities often suffer the most in a car-dependent city. As Jeff Speck eloquently explains in his book *Walkable City Rules*, “most visually impaired people can move independently only

while walking, and they are effectively disabled by communities that mandate cars for getting around.” While there are still options for the visually impaired, their implementation is often sloppy. Though generally overlooked, the brightly colored, dotted patterns on sidewalks near intersections are a common example of these options. Those patterns are part of a system called tactile paving, which aims to warn those with visual impairments when they are about to encounter a hazard. In this case, the hazard is an intersection. Not only are these scarcely distributed, they commonly fail to serve another crucial purpose: to point people in the right direction. The dots, called blisters, on these portions of the sidewalk, should be arranged in rows that point directly to the destination on the other side of the street. This way, someone using a white cane knows the direction they need to walk to make a safe crossing. However, in many places, these blisters are arbitrarily rotated, potentially causing an unsuspecting pedestrian to find themselves in the center of a busy intersection. Inconsistencies like these make the whole system useless. If you can’t trust some of them, you can’t trust any of them.

Curb cuts, or the ramps cut into the curb between the sidewalk and the street, are another common accessibility feature that we take for granted. They’re a welcome addition to the sidewalk when carrying heavy objects or pushing a stroller, but for those in wheelchairs, they’re a necessity. This phenomenon is known as the curb cut effect, the idea that technology designed for the margins of society can help everybody.

Ed Roberts contracted polio at age fourteen, relying on an iron lung to stay alive. He was paralyzed below the neck, only able to move two fingers on his left hand. In 1962, he was turned down from U.C. Berkeley, not for academic reasons, but because they weren’t sure where they could fit an iron lung. Eventually, they decided to repurpose a patient room at the campus hospital, and Roberts was finally accepted. His story began making headlines, inspiring more paralyzed students to apply to Berkeley. Before long, his campus hospital became the headquarters for a group of organizers called the Rolling Quads, whose purpose was to advocate for the idea that people with disabilities had civil rights. Luckily, by the time Roberts was in graduate school, disabled students could zip around in power chairs, a technology that was recently invented to assist wounded veterans. These gave students the freedom to leave their wheelchair attendant behind, but they still had to deal with curbs.

In 1971, the Rolling Quads showed up at the Berkeley City Council and demanded that the city build curb cuts on every corner, a motion that passed with a surprising lack of resistance. This movement eventually led to the passing of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), mandating access for people with disabilities in all places open to the public, which is why we now see wheelchair lifts on buses, ramps along staircases, elevators with reachable buttons, and low service counters.

Despite the incredible progress made by Roberts and the Rolling Quads, implementation today is still lacking. I live in one of the most walkable neighborhoods in my city, and curb cuts are still disappearing without a trace on the streets surrounding my house. The city should be accessible to everybody, regardless of ability, and regardless of class. Unfortunately, this isn't a reality, and it's no surprise that we are not hearing the voices of the disadvantaged at city meetings.

The solutions to these injustices are not elusive. Every investment in walking, biking, and public transit, such as widening sidewalks and adding protected bike lanes to streets, lessens the need for a car and opens up the city for the differently abled. As simple as these solutions are, they still make many lawmakers uneasy. Why is that?

Mobility advocates are used to hearing that walkability is an unrealistic economic goal that will end up costing the city too much money for too little in return. Unfortunately, people hear these falsities and run with them, but if they would stop to look at the statistics, they would quickly find the opposite. America's most walkable metros generate 49% more GDP per capita than its least walkable metros. A study in Baltimore has discovered that compared to highway investments, every dollar spent on pedestrian infrastructure created 57% more jobs and every dollar spent on bike infrastructure created 100% more jobs. The city of Copenhagen similarly estimates that every mile driven by car costs the city 20 cents, while every mile biked earns the city 42 cents. Not to mention, these improvements cost a fraction of what our roads cost. The explanations for these statistics are numerous. Increasing the mobility and range of people with lower incomes helps support businesses all over the city, and any person, regardless of income, is more likely to enter a store when walking or biking past it than when driving past it. The economic excuse is precisely that, an excuse.

There is a far more severe objection to walkability, and that's the question of gentrification. It is true that walkability drives up the property values in neighborhoods, so many worry that this supposedly helpful infrastructure will push people out of their homes. This is a result of conflating development with displacement. Gentrification is inevitable. Neighborhoods change, and it should not be our goal to leave every neighborhood in the state that we found it in, especially in poorer neighborhoods, where gentrification leads to decreases in violent crime. Displacement, on the other hand, is not inevitable. Cities like Boston and Philadelphia have introduced programs that allow longtime homeowners to cap or freeze their property taxes. As a simpler solution, displacement can be limited by building attainable housing projects in developing neighborhoods. Development, when done responsibly, doesn't lead to displacement, and instead opens the city for people from all walks of life.

It's easy to feel helpless in situations like these, but there is so much more that we could be doing. The simplest way to spread the word is to point out these injustices where they exist. Show your friends the places where tactile paving fails. Bring attention to where curb cuts don't exist. Additionally, be a voice for the voiceless. The people who are suffering the most are not the ones showing up to city meetings and town halls. The ideals of "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness" strike marvelous images of freedom and prosperity into our minds. These ideals are only attainable if we all possess a fundamental human right: the right to move.

Massimiliano A. Saitta

Human Rights Essay Contest

13 January 2020

Suppression of A Different Love

Human Rights are morals regularly protected as natural and legal rights in all forms of law. Throughout history laws have been made to accommodate for a minority's personal life and lifestyle. The Civil Rights Movement of 1964 started the new revelation of creating rights for minorities suppressed by the majority in the United States. The movement outlawed discrimination based on race, color, religion, sex and national origin in public places, employment and education. Yet, the one aspect of a person not covered is one's sexuality. Anyone who is a part of the LGBTQIA+ community receives no protection by any national law everywhere in the United States. Whether that be in public places, employment and education, these laws should exist for every and anyone.

This community has suffered through so much strife throughout history. In 1969, the Stonewall riots in New York City mark the beginning of the modern gay civil rights era. The Stonewall riots included a series of spontaneous demonstrations by members of the LGBT community against a police raid. These raids by the police were to find any possible reason to shut down places that were safe havens for the poorest and most marginalized people in the gay community and arrest them. At that time any sexual interactions between the same sex were illegal (Pruitt). All this occurred because the suppression that this community face was pent up inside.

The AIDS epidemic in the 1980s significantly impacted this community and still does. This disease is a spectrum of conditions caused by infection with the human immunodeficiency

virus, meaning that one is facing progressive failure of their immune system allowing life-threatening infections and cancers to take over (“HIV/AIDS”). Once known, borders became stricter to keep the disease in and prevent an outspread. Sadly, some people believed that those affected deserved to suffer from it. With technology improving throughout the years, new medicine exists to help those with HIV/AIDS continue the life that they are living (“HIV/AIDS”). It may not be a cure, but it is helping the community live and stay strong.

Homosexuality used to be considered a mental disorder. Around the 1950s-1960s therapists had purportedly found a “cure” to male homosexuality. The process of this cure is downright morally wrong to inflict upon another human being. This consisted of showing photographs of nude men while send electrical currents directly to the body in small pulses or sending drugs into the body to make one vomit and feel sick about this attraction. These methods did not work in any means to “convert” the feelings that homosexuals/ gay people possess to be true to themselves. In 1968, the DSM-II, the American classification of mental disorders of the time, listed homosexuality as a mental disorder. This was until in the 19th century that homosexuality was appropriated from the Church, and then in some strange reverse way to regard it in a better way, transformed it from sin to a mental disorder. In 1973, the American Psychiatric Association (APA) asked all members attending its convention to vote on whether they believed homosexuality to be a mental disorder. 5,854 psychiatrists voted to remove homosexuality from the DSM and 3,810 to retain it. The APA then compromised, removing homosexuality from the DSM but replacing it, in effect, with "sexual orientation disturbance" for people "in conflict with" their sexual orientation (Burton).

Not until 1987 did homosexuality completely fall out of the DSM. Meanwhile, the World Health Organization (WHO) only removed homosexuality from its ICD classification with the

publication of ICD-10 in 1992, although ICD-10 still carries the construct of "ego-dystonic sexual orientation" (Burton). In this condition, the person is not in doubt about his or her sexual preference, but "wishes it were different because of associated psychological and behavioral disorders"(Burton).

As seen more recently, people who identify as transgender or non-binary are being killed. At least 22 transgender and gender non-conforming people have been murdered in the U.S. in 2019 (Vagianos). I say at least because sadly too often many of these stories go unreported, or misreported. Yet no major media outlets have reported any of these incidents to notify the world (King). The HRC (Human Rights Campaign) has been tracking reports such as these for the past several years. The majority of victims were people of color as well. Given the more recent awareness of intersectionality, this issue is not just about gender but also race.

LGBTQIA+ rights in the U.S. have evolved over time and vary on a state-by-state basis. Family, marriage, and anti-discrimination laws vary by state. It was not until 2003 that in the U.S. sexual acts between people of the same sex became legal nationwide, following the U.S. Supreme Court ruling in *Lawrence v. Texas* ("Non-Discrimination Laws"). In Nebraska, currently there is no law that explicitly prohibits discrimination based on sexual orientation or gender identity in state law. No employment non-discrimination law covering sexual orientation or gender identity, through federal law offers some protection ("Non-Discrimination Laws"). Personally, living here and identifying as a member of the LGBTQIA+ community, it is very displeasing to say that the place where I live does not offer any law to protect myself from discrimination.

I myself identify as a member of the LGBTQIA+ community. Growing up I was constantly the odd one out. I was always different from the other kids. My interests strayed from

the stereotype that my gender was “supposed” to follow. The way that I acted and behaved was different as well. Even my vocal intonation contrasted the stereotypical gender expectation. As a young child, no one really cared since one is young and does not know any better. Yet as the older one gets, the more they should follow society’s stereotypical gender roles that “men are masculine” and “girls are feminine”. I did not fit that and faced bullying and self-hatred. Going to school made me face the truth of how others acted with what they believe to be wrong. Others confronted me, asking who I was. Being young and terrified of what the possibilities could be if I was honest, I conformed as best I could. I did not specifically know what they were asking and what it meant, but any wrong answer resulted in social exclusion and bullying.

All that I ask for is a better world for everyone and anyone. As big of a dream that is, I know that we cannot accomplish it by wishing and hoping alone. People must take action to make this shared LBGTQIA+ community dream become a reality. Slowly growing with each day, the fight to advocate for more LBGTQIA+ people strengthens. Obstacles will always exist, but obstacles help those facing adversity become stronger and better than who they were.

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Jackie Iraheta-Baires

Mrs. Palmesano

Human Rights Essay Contest

26 January 2020

In his presidency, Donald Trump has targeted immigrants from Central America. With his proposal to construct a billion-dollar wall on the Mexican border he has also set new policies to prevent immigrants or refugees from entering the United States. The Trump administration has also targeted dreamers. The White House has targeted immigrants and are violating their human right to seek asylum, as well as, dehumanizing the Latinx community.

The Trump administration created detention centers where immigrants would be detained. Many of those in these detention centers are children that are separated from their families. The treatment in these centers is inhumane and concerning. In May of 2019, a 16-year old boy from Guatemala died while in a cell in Texas. Carlos Gregorio Hernandez Vasquez was a migrant that was in the care of the United States Border Patrol. A nurse diagnosed Vasquez with the flu. Video surveillance showed his cellmate finding his body next to the toilet (Moore). The video surveillance contradicts how the Border Patrol described finding his body.

Vasquez was not given the proper treatment for his illness. The Border Patrol failed to check in and administer the proper health care for Vasquez. Unfortunately, Vasquez's death is not a lone case of deaths in these detention centers. These detention centers are becoming increasingly overcrowded. Detainees are not provided with proper care or sanitation. The facilities are holding more people than the normal capacity (Stieb). The max capacity is very concerning. It is inhumane for these facilities to have such a high degree of overcrowding. The

migrants in these buildings are still human beings. They deserve the same care as any other person, regardless of their immigration status.

Even more concerning is the United States' treatment of children in these detention camps. Children were separated from their families and taken to these facilities. The age ranges from infants to thirteen-years old. According to a news article, children were forced to sleep on the concrete floor for losing a brush. Children were told to share the comb when there was a lice outbreak (Stieb). Sharing combs while there is a lice outbreak will cause the lice to spread. This shows the lack of hygiene that is provided in these detention centers. In regard to the flu outbreak in some facilities and the death of Carlos Vasquez, the United States Customs and Border Patrol is treating these migrants unlawfully. They are not taking responsibility for their wrongdoings.

Another issue that is happening in these facilities is how children are taking care of other children. This exemplifies the lack of care the Border Patrol agents are giving to the children in these detention camps. A child should not be facing these types of issues. When these children grow up their time in these detention facilities will be traumatizing. Their brains are still developing at a young age and the mistreatment they are facing will impact them. The Trump administration is attempting to remove the Flores agreement which sets a limit on the amount of time children can be held in detention. It also gives the United States government the authority to provide care for the children (Shear). The removal of the Flores agreement is likely a way to discourage people from coming into the United States.

The mistreatment is not only happening to children but also to adults. It is said that detainees go days without showers or brushing their teeth. It is also stated that the meals provided are non-consumable (Serwer). Congresswoman Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez documented her experience visiting the Customs and Border Patrol facilities in a set of tweets. Officers inside

the facilities were ill mannered towards members of Congress. Cortez talked about the abuse that she encountered such as guards telling detainees to drink the water from toilets (Stieb). These actions are dehumanizing migrants, which is a violation of human rights.

No child and no human should be facing the horrors that lie within these detention centers. It is cruel to treat these migrants like this. These people are only looking for a better life. In a world full of violence and poverty it becomes necessary to seek safety. For many, the United States is a place that can provide sanctuary from the violence of drug cartels or gangs. The Trump administration is ripping families apart. President Trump's policies show his lack of compassion and prejudice towards Latinos. The mistreatment of people in these detention centers must be stopped. It is inhumane for these families to be punished for seeking a better life. The dehumanization of these people is against human rights and the United States must prevent these malicious actions.

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Alexandria Gabrielle Schmidt

UNO High School Human Rights Essay

2 February 2019

Stewarding the Public Opinion: The Boundaries of Freedom

As one can deduce from the young adult novel *Divergent*, within fictional dystopian worlds it's dangerous, even deadly to be radically different. However, many are aware that such concepts concerning bravely challenging the status quo are palatable when housed in the clearly fictional. It is easy and entertaining to consume such real and potent concepts because audiences are given a decent plot and are presented with well-written protagonists that one *wants* to love and antagonists one *wants* to hate. The story often feels removed from anything immediately concerning the reader. It turns out that creating propaganda and spreading it is quite similar, in the ways of crafting an entertaining story and writing the protagonists and antagonists in a way that makes mainstream society support one group or person that the audience feels closer to, and condemn the opposing parties. During and before the Civil Rights Movement, most can agree that white supremacist propaganda ran rampant. However, the American government and mainstream American society has, and continues to use certain tactics as a way of influencing the minds of American citizens to coerce them into following whatever mainstream America dictates--which, today is considerably intertwined with white supremacism.

The Black Panther Party for Self-Defense (BPP) was criminalized because it was dubbed a national threat by the FBI. Thus, it would be useful for the American government to convince the American public to support the American government and wholeheartedly trust its judgment. During the 1960's, "The majority of Americans, however – especially white middle- and working-class Americans – saw no reason whatsoever to celebrate the Panthers. In their eyes the group was a clear threat to law and order: a dangerous band of gun-wielding macho revolutionaries who sided with

America's Cold War enemies and who seemed to hate the US and everything it stood for" (10). J. Edgar Hoover and the FBI launched 233 (out of 295) counterintelligence actions against the BPP through the COINTELPRO program and the BPP was declared the "number one threat to national security" (19). Interestingly enough, the FBI record reflects that COINTELPRO also targeted groups such as the KKK (7), despite the fact that the BPP was subject to 79% of the COINTELPRO FBI operations (19). While the government cryptically admits "COINTELPRO was later rightfully criticized by Congress and the American people for abridging first amendment rights and for other reasons" (7). However, nowhere in the description is there any information specifically the suppression of the BPP because the US government at the time, based their decisions and actions on fundamentally racist ideals. The omission of specific details on the crimes that the US government committed, and the equivocal statement of 'other reasons' is where ambiguity arises- ambiguity being in which the problem of misinformation lies. Ambiguous information allows for the masses to accept incomplete or misinformation as the truth.

Thus, when there is ambiguity concerning the merit of the actions taken by the American government there is then room for multiple skewed perceptions to take root and grow within American society. During the 1960's, the "*US News and World Report* and *Reader's Digest* tantalized readers and added black nationalist prestige with tales of their revolutionary articles... "Who Are the Terrorists Among Us," and "Terrorism Is Developing into a Form of War"- articles that were all about the BPP (19). However, the propaganda of the 1960's fails to address the fact that the Panthers worked to revitalize their impoverished (primarily black) communities through free medical clinics, free breakfast program for children, and free legal aid programs (3) (8) (9) (10) (17) (20). That omission is so, presumably because it's much harder to convince one's audience of the protagonist's legitimacy if the antagonist of the story (the BPP) has honorable motives reflected via consistently expressed honorable actions. The BPP, while being supporters of Marxism/communism, they were far more than the aggressive, dangerous black nationalists that many believed they were. Through portraying a powerful, undaunted

pro-Afro image they challenged the status quo about what a self-confident person with power must be, a concept that most likely intimidated and unsettled the aforementioned mainstream white majority. That same concept posed a considerable threat to the US government's ability to control the collective consciousness of minorities because a united, physically, and mentally empowered group of minorities is much harder to influence and control than an impoverished and uneducated minority population. The pervading perception of the BPP during the 1960's still endures today, and the epitome of such a survival of the public opinion of the BPP merged with the progressive movements of the 2000s can be exemplified through Beyoncé's Superbowl performance of Formation, with costumes (afros, berets, leather jackets, etc.) and notions of black empowerment reminiscent of the Black Panther Party. "As thousands of African Americans took to social media to praise Beyoncé, they were opposed by white conservatives who vented their fury over the artist's celebration of the 1960s' radicals" (10). Thus, while recently there has been a renewed recognition of the validity of an empowered black population in America, there has been an equally renewed opposition to such notions. The government's influence on public opinion hinges on the media's endorsement of perceptions and portrayals of canonized government ideologies.

Earlier, it was mentioned that the American government admitting to "abridging first amendment rights" (7) through the tactics of the COINTELPRO program. However, such restrictions on freedom of speech continue to pervade society. A prime example being that at Marquette University in 2015, a group of students (endorsed by the founding director of the Gender and Sexuality Resource Center, Susannah Bartlow) painted a mural of Black Panther Assata Shakur, (an alleged murderer) with one of her quotes about how the reigning institution will not give you the education necessary to overthrow them, and they will not teach a person's true history if that knowledge sets them free (2). (She is an *alleged* murderer because if the US government had a clear bias against Black Panthers and a clear agenda to eliminate and incriminate them then there is motive for intervention and injustice

concerning her trial. Such 'biased justice' being shown on many occasions concerning Assata, one of which being when she was being tried for the murder of New Jersey state trooper Foerster and the jury of her 'peers' was that of "(counting substitutes) twelve white women and four white men" (4). Six weeks later the mural was painted over with white paint (literally whitewashed), and Bartlow was fired. Bartlow goes on to write an article, in which she says, "what was whitewashed was evidence of a power that could not be tolerated. The mural represented student empowerment and resistance to white supremacy, independent and collective decision making, and incorporation into the body of the university" (2). Just as with the empowerment of the black community through the BPP, the Assata mural was similarly eliminated. What's more is that Bartlow observed that, "The right-wing sources carried out an expert manipulation of current media systems in its grassroots-to-nightly news cycle" (2) when avoiding the topic of the Assata mural or reframing it to (yet again) demonize a panther. Once again, the goals of enforcing the common law of white society were fulfilled with support of the media and the endorsement of the reigning power (in this case with Marquette University). Once again, first amendment rights were 'abridged', but this time by a respected university instead of the U.S government.

While there is undeniable progress that has taken place in the fields of human rights and justice, there is still a thin layer of seemingly impenetrable residue from the era of overt racist propaganda that still suffocates today's media and heavily restricts the educated public's tolerance for radical, yet empowering free speech. The spreading of an incomplete narrative on the true nature of the BPP through strategic, structural racism practiced by the U.S. government was a trademark of the recent past. Now, there has been a subtle shift from outright conspiracy against black empowerment to a normalized condemnation of black empowerment by mainstream white society- a viewpoint that is kept alive through media support. It seems that all Americans are free up until the point to which their views begin to contradict the clearly observable, yet unofficial common laws of mainstream white society, and

unless an individual has the riches and media influence of Beyoncé, they may end up criminalized like the BPP or condemned like Bartlow and the students at Marquette University. To combat this fate, society as a whole must be willing to utilize critical analysis in order to develop thoughts and viewpoints that are independent of the ideologies and perceptions people are presented in their everyday lives. We must collectively be willing to look beyond the preconceived notions of what makes a protagonist and an antagonist and develop our own conclusions in order to transcend the boundaries imposed upon our freedom.

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